

Minutes  
Community Voices/Budget Choices Facilitation Committee  
May 21, 2008

The committee met at the Town Room, Town Hall. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

Isaac Ben Ezra, Alison Donta-Venman, Katherine Vorwerk Feldman, Stanley Gawle, Martha Hanner, Gerald Jolly, Janet Lansberry, Irvin Rhodes, Bob Saul, and Richard Spurgin (by phone) were present from the committee, as was Andrew Steinberg, Budget Coordinating Group liaison to the committee.

John Musante (Assistant Town Manager and Treasurer), Jonathan Tucker (Planning Director), Jim Wald, (Chair, Comprehensive Planning Committee) were also present.

Agenda:

1. Clarification of the Committee Charge
2. The Master Plan – questions about the plan and discussion about how it relates to the Community Choices process
3. Examples of similar efforts in other communities, scheduling a presentation by someone with expertise at community engagement
4. How to conduct outreach and engage the public; what the committee needs to do to legitimize the community process
5. Identification of data that the committee needs
6. Consideration of how the committee will function – designation of subcommittees, committee chair, support needed

Steinberg chaired the meeting by agreement of the committee. The agenda distributed prior to the meeting was adopted with the addition of clarification of the committee charge to assure that all members are committed to it. There was brief discussion about who would take minutes, and the staff support available to the committee. Steinberg pointed out that it is difficult to chair and take minutes but he would do so again, for this meeting.

1. The discussion about the committee charge focused on the second element, public engagement to elicit public input on long-term preferences for service priorities, levels of service, funding levels, and funding options. At least one member indicated that it is not an area of his expertise or interest. Others recognized that it is an important part of the process as designed by the BCG and approved by the Select Board. There is a desire that this process not duplicate the Master Plan process and recognition that we lack the resources, time and consultant support to do that.

2. Wald and Tucker distribute the current draft of Section 2 of the draft, Goals and Priorities, and described the process for the completion of the Master Plan. The plan is substantially completed and the committee is going through each section for the purpose of final editing. There will be a limited process for additional public review in the fall, before it is presented to the Planning Board for final adoption. The committee queried whether this would be a significant public process that would happen simultaneously with its public engagement and

compete for the community's attention. Tucker said that the public input for the Master Plan is completed and he did not see this as a concern for the Facilitation Committee.

The discussion then focused on how the Master Plan addresses the issues of community services and facilities and how it affects the Community Voices/Budget Choices process. The draft of the section on Services and Facilities, Section 8, is available on the web site but has not been edited. Wald described the Master Plan as a living document that sets parameters for future processes, such as the development of a long-term financial plan. It describes what people want but it does not establish budget priorities. Tucker said that the departments are using it to develop their budgets and for planning. The Facilitation Committee recognized that it is implementing part of the Master Plan, which is a policy guide. The Comprehensive Planning Committee considered the community aspirations. The issue of available resources is reflected in the strategies section of each chapter.

3. Steinberg reported that he has been searching the web to see if he could find helpful examples of community engagement processes for financial planning processes. He has not found much that is useful. He reported that Superintendent Hochman has sent an inquiry to Rod Wright, the planning consultant who met with the BCG and advised it on how to develop a planning process. Wright might be willing to come to Amherst again to meet with the Facilitation Committee. There was a question about cost. Steinberg and Musante indicated that it could only be the travel expenses and, if so, cost should not be an issue. Steinberg said that minutes are available from the BCG meeting when Wright made his presentation. The committee asked that they be distributed and thought it would be useful to ask Hochman to make a presentation about his experience with working with Wright and his understanding about public engagement in priority and financial planning processes before we ask Wright to come from St. Louis.

4. The committee discussed whether CPC members who developed and led the public engagement for the Master Plan process can assist us. Andy agreed to call Alisa Brewer on the committee's behalf. Other names were suggested including Alan Root and Jim Oldham. This process will be more focused because there will be a "product" from the committee's work to format the public discussion. We need to know what we are asking the public. There was discussion about whether the Master Plan was about identification of "wants" and this process needs to consider "needs." Engagement will need to include an education process so that the community can grapple with how to intersect values with available resources. The League of Women Voters is an additional resource.

5. Donta-Venman distributed data tables she developed that will organize some of the essential information that the committee will need. The committee expressed its appreciation for her work and will review the tables.

6. The committee postponed discussion about designation of subcommittees or selection of a chair. We reviewed the time line and will update it regularly. The meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

Andrew Steinberg, acting clerk